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Edjean Semeleer, Marlene van der Linde crowned Dande King and Queen 2011!

One of the biggest traditional musical events on Aruba, the Dande Festival features over 50 singers accompanied by typical musical groups that present their original compositions and lyrics, as well as the traditional dande.

A Dande group, a troupe of traveling musicians, is meant to brighten the New Year with a song bestowing blessings, goodwill and prosperity.

This year, at the 39th Annual Dande Festival Edjean Semeleer was crowned Dande King and Marlene van der Linde, performing with Los Hermanos Dande Queen 2011.

Prime Minister Mike



Photo depict L to R: Dande Queen Marlene van der Linden, PM Eman, Harry Croes and Edjean Semeleer at (front) Eman and competition organizers Harry Croes did the hon- ors crowning the King and Queen.

N. Korea bids wintry mass farewell to late leader

SEOUL, South Korea (AFP) - Tens of thousands of weeping North Koreans bade farewell yesterday to longtime leader Kim Jong-Il as his young son and successor walked beside his father's coffin through a snowbound Pyongyang.

Kim Jong-Un was at the forefront of the three-hour procession, in what analysts said was an attempt to bolster the

image of the untested new leader of the impoverished but nuclear-armed nation.

The cortege started and ended its 40 kilometer (25 mile) journey at the Kumsusan Memorial Palace, where the late strongman's body had lain in state in a glass coffin.

Preceded by a car bearing a huge portrait of a smiling Kim and other vehicles, a limousine

carried Kim's coffin -- draped with a red ruling party flag and surrounded by white flowers - on its roof.

Jong-Un, dressed in black and gloveless despite the cold, held the side of his father's hearse, accompanied by his influential uncle Jang Song-Thaek and other officials.

"We have paraded here to bid farewell to our respected supreme commander," the head of a military honour guard said in a tearful voice, before a 21-gun salute was fired at the end of the ceremony.

Goose-stepping soldiers carrying dozens of party and military flags marched in salute to Jong-Un and senior officials.

Continued on page 5



This handout picture taken by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday, shows mourners crying as a car Kim Jong-Il's body passes by during the funeral procession in Pyongyang. (AFP)

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The General Obligatory Pension Law expected to pass Parliament

ORANJESTAR -- This week the Aruba Parliament will deliberate over the proposed law regarding the General Obligatory Pension, and is expected to vote unanimously to approve this proposed law and enact it into law. This new law will come alongside the existing Old Age Pension program (AOV), the Law of Stipends (bijstand), and the AZV.

Researchers tell us that there are only two other countries in the world that has such a pension program. Come January 1st, 2012 when this program becomes law, every employee working in the private sector will begin contributing to their pension. Today about 70% of all employees on Aruba depend completely on the existing Old Age Pension (AOV) when they reach retirement age. For a married couple this results in an income of merely Afls.1700 per month, and for a single person the amount is a meager Afls.1000 per month. In view of the cost of living in Aruba this kind of income will not suffice for a person to live comfortably and according to the existing norms. Hence, the reason why so many seek employment after retiring from their jobs in order to help make ends meet.

Currently, there is a drastic



drop in income the moment a person reaches retirement age; the drop is about 25% of the last salary earned. And, this may be as high as 35% for those who earned a higher income (two times the minimum wage) and 50% for those earning minimum wages. For each of the three categories the drop in income is drastic if they must depend solely on the Old Age Pension (AOV) at retirement. This is currently the reality for 70% of all employees on Aruba. With the introduction of the new General Obligatory Pension Program this will be something of the past.

During FATUM's seminar on Pension, director of FATUM, Mr. Frankel, indi-

cated that the new Pension Law will not only mean more income for pensioners, but also a stimulus for the economy as our seniors will have more money to spend.

The government is convinced that this new pension program is a reflection of the solidarity of the Aruban people. The solidarity of the employer because each party, employee and employer will be paying for this new pension facility. The objective of the government has always been to improve the buying power of those with the lowest incomes. This pension law will be still another manner in which that objective will be realized.

Dutch Somalians erect Occupy-style tent camp

TER APEL -- A tent camp erected by Somalians in protest against Dutch asylum policies keeps expanding.

Twenty-five men and women have now set up their tents outside the gates of the Ter Apel deportation centre.

The Somalians are failed asylum seekers who argue they cannot return to their country of origin. "This means they have to live on the streets", says Margreet Jenezon from STIL, an organisation which provides assistance to failed asylum seekers.

She argues more Somalians are en route to Ter Apel.

"More and more people keep arriving. We are worried about that. We don't have enough tents."

Earlier, the Somalians rejected an offer by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service (IND) to offer them accommodation for one week. The Somalians are seeking a structural solution, says Jenezon.

Yesterday, the IND came with a new offer – to submit a new request for asylum based on the most recent regulations and to put the asylum-seekers up until their case has been investigated.



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New National Laboratory nearing completion

ORANJESTAD -- The Aruba National Laboratory in the center of Oranjestad has been existing for many years, but recently it has moved to a new building located closer to the Hospital. The new laboratory building has been specially designed to execute all the necessary processes in the area of microbiology, the study of infections, bacteria, parasites, etc.

All the processes that were conducted in the Oranjestad facility will continue in their new facility. The only exception will be the taking of blood samples and stool. These tests will continue to be taken in Oranjestad to facilitate those who may have difficulty getting all the way to the hospital area.

Five years and several

months ago the privatization project of the National Laboratory began under the leadership of a commission which has finally reached the final phase of this project. The members of the commission, Mr. Wever, a member of the Board, the Legislative Department, Department of PNO, SEPPA, worked diligently on preparing a complete document regarding privatization.

According to Minister of Public Health, Richard Visser, the final step in the privatization process is necessary to guarantee a better quality of health care. The government is convinced that the privatization of the National Laboratory will make the Laboratory a pleasant place where employees can

work, and will make it a trustworthy partner in our health care system. It will also offer employees the possibility to grow. Mr. Rigaud will be the president of the privatization committee. And it is expected that by July 1st 2012 the privatization process will be formally enacted.

The government is pleased that finally we can work together with all the stakeholders working in the field of health care, such as the Volksgezondheid (People's Health Care services), the National Laboratory, the Hospital, SVB, and IMSAN. They have been meeting together regularly to delineate what ought to be the best level of health care for our people.



National Laboratory Center in Oranjestad



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A Hyatt Christmas vacation to remember



Tom and Jenny, and their three children, Drew, Alex and Amanda of Ohio, couldn't think of a better place to share the Christmas Holidays than together at the Hyatt on Aruba's beautiful Palm Beach. Between home, business and being away at school, family quality time is not as much as they would like. Coming to the Hyatt over the years has been their special home away from home vacation. We look forward to seeing them again next year.

Photos by Diane Keijzer

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Holidays on Aruba is the time for old friends to gather and celebrate



One of the things we most enjoy about the end of the year is greeting again our loyal friends who believe the only way to celebrate the New Year is by watching the fireworks and sharing a champagne toast on Aruba..

We caught such a group, which is returning again for their 32nd year from Medellin, Colombia, staked out in their usual territory on the ABC Beach. Issak Herskovich and his friends, the Yanovich, Kovalsky and Finkelsztein families have been coming to Aruba every year for the holidays since their children were pre-teens, and now THEIR children are teenagers.

They can't imagine not being together on Aruba at this time; in their opinion, there is no better place to be, or better company to be with.

We at THE MORNING NEWS celebrate their devotion along with that of so many others who during holiday time, the place to be is Aruba's beaches.

If you have such a story and wish to share it and have your picture in the paper, please contact us at 593-6462, we would love to hear it and feature you in our next edition.

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Wilders warns coalition partners



Geert Wilders

Freedom Party leader Geert Wilders has warned the cabinet that he would prefer early elections to a tightening of conditions for mortgage interest tax rebates and interest-only mortgages.

The ruling minority coalition of CDA Christian democrats and VVD conservatives relies on the Freedom Party for parliamentary support.

Mr Wilders made his objections to mortgage reform clear in a number of tweets he sent yesterday. The Freedom Party leader has repeatedly stated his strong objections to any form of mortgage reform, which is seen by many as essential to revitalising the housing market.

He reacted to an article in current affairs magazine Elsevier which said that the cabinet was considering tightening the rules regarding mortgage interest tax rebates.

Only last week, Prime Minister Mark Rutte emphasised that nobody was "drawing a bead" on mortgage interest tax rebates.

N. Korea bids wintry mass farewell to late leader



This handout picture taken by North Korea's official Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) yesterday, shows Kim Jong-Un (C) saluting besides the convoy carrying the body of his father and late leader Kim Jong-Il at Kumsusan Memorial Palace in Pyongyang. (AFP)

Kim Jong-Il's absolute 17-year rule was marked by a 1990s famine that killed hundreds of thousands, a crumbling state-directed economy and the pursuit of missiles and nuclear weapons which brought international sanctions.

UN agencies have said six million people -- a quarter of the population -- still urgently need food aid.

But vast crowds of shivering soldiers and civilians, many weeping bitterly or beating the frozen ground, were seen on state television lining the route or parading outside

the palace.

The late Kim inherited power from his own father and founding president Kim Il-Sung before passing it on to his son.

The dynasty has been buttressed by a huge personality cult, the world's fourth-largest military and a repressive internal security apparatus.

Kim died while taking a train to make a "field guidance" visit, state media has said, portraying him as a tireless worker for his people to the end.

"We will overcome the

overwhelming grief today and continue our victory... as we have comrade Kim Jong-Un, the supreme leader of our party and people," said a female TV presenter during a live broadcast.

Mourning will officially end today with a nationwide memorial service including a three-minute silence.

Kim's body is expected to be embalmed in the memorial palace where the corpse of his father is already on display, according to South Korean newspaper Korea JoongAng Daily.

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TUESDAY AND FRIDAY: LIVE MUSIC

International News

Syria urged to give observers free hand



Arab monitors revisited the flashpoint Syrian city of Homs Wednesday and headed to other protest hubs as world powers warned Damascus not to hinder their mission, aimed at revealing the truth about a crackdown on dissent.

DAMASCUS (AFP) - Arab monitors revisited the flashpoint Syrian city of Homs Wednesday and headed to other protest hubs as world powers warned Damascus not to hinder their mission, aimed at revealing the truth about a crackdown on dissent.

More bloodshed was reported as army defectors killed at least four Syrian soldiers in the southern province of Daraa, two civilians were shot dead in Homs' Baba Amro quarter, another in Hama and one during protests in Aleppo province, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported.

Also reported were arrests and gunshot injuries in Idlib province and more shooting injuries, with three suspected fatalities, in a village near Damascus.

Accusations that the regime was trying to hide the facts from the monitors were punctuated by France, which claimed the team was not being allowed to see what was happening in Homs as repression continued there.

Those concerns were highlighted when residents of Homs' Baba Amro quarter refused to allow observers in be-

cause they were accompanied by an army officer, the Observatory said. The standoff ended when the officer withdrew.

The residents asked the monitors to "come and see the wounded people and the parents of the martyrs, and not members of the (ruling) Baath party," Observatory chief Rami Abdel Rahman said.

The monitors also visited the Bab Sebaa quarter of Homs, where the Observatory said the regime had organised a parade in support of President Bashar al-Assad.

The observers were due to visit Daraa, cradle of the nine-month anti-regime protests, as well as the northern provinces of Hama and Idlib, and around Damascus.

French foreign ministry spokesman Bernard Valero said Tuesday's visit had been too brief and insufficiently revealing.

"The brevity of their visit did not allow them to understand the reality of the situation in Homs. The Arab League observers must be allowed to return without delay to this martyr city, to travel everywhere in it freely and to have the necessary contact

with the public."

The mission is part of an Arab plan endorsed by Syria on November 2 that calls for the withdrawal of security forces from towns and residential districts, a halt to violence against civilians and the release of detainees.

Valero said "the international community will be reassured when the violence has stopped, when the army had returned to barracks, when the political prisoners are freed and when foreign journalists will receive visas to go to Syria."



NEW YORK : Seen here workers attaching 288 new Waterford Crystal Triangles on the 2012 Times Square New Year's Eve Ball at One Times Square in New York City.

Venezuela on track for S. America 2011 murder record

CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela is on track to set a new record murder rate and to remain South America's most violent country, according to data released by a crime watchdog.

The Venezuela Violence Monitor (OVV) said Tuesday that 19,336 people had been murdered in 2011, an average of 53 per day in a country of 29 million.

"We must inform the nation that 2011 will end as the most violent year in the nation's history," the group said in a press release.

The group's figures indicate that the rate of homicides climbed to 67 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2011, constituting an "epidemic" of violence.

Violent crime is a leading concern, both for Venezuelans fearful for their personal safety and for left-wing President Hugo Chavez's government, which provides only limited violent crime figures.

In February, the interior

minister admitted that the homicide rate had climbed to 48 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in 2010 but did not give a precise count, saying only that there were around 14,000 killings that year.

Venezuela's murder rates in 2010 and 2011 are the highest in South America, according to government data.

Venezuela's murder rate surpassed those of neighboring Colombia, which was 32 per 100,000 inhabitants last year, and Mexico, which was 14 per 100,000 inhabitants.

Colombia is beset by a leftist insurgency and Mexico is in the throes of a bloody war among drug cartels.

Several Latin American nations have murder rates multiple times higher than the global average.

The small Central American nation of Honduras is likely to have the highest murder rate in the world in 2011, with an estimated 86 per 100,000 inhabitants, the Violence Observatory in Tegucigalpa, a UN-backed monitor, reported in November.

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International News

Bomb at Arabic school in Nigeria adds to sectarian fears

LAGOS (AFP) - Attackers threw a bomb into an Arabic school in mainly Christian southern Nigeria, wounding six children and an adult, police said Wednesday, after Christmas attacks sparked fears of sectarian clashes.

Meanwhile, some 90,000 people were displaced in the hard hit northeastern city of Damaturu after clashes between Islamist group Boko Haram and security forces last week, with officials rushing to provide relief materials.

Christmas bombings blamed on Boko Haram that killed 40 people occurred in several locations in Nigeria, with the deadliest an explosion outside a church near the capital Abuja as services were ending.

Nigerian leaders have been seeking to calm tensions amid fears the Christmas attacks

could set off sectarian clashes in Africa's most populous nation and largest oil producer, roughly divided between a mainly Muslim north and predominately Christian south.

It was not clear who was behind the bomb attack at the Arabic school in Delta state, located in the oil-producing Niger Delta region.

While scores of explosions have occurred in the delta in recent years, they have mainly targeted oil installations and have not taken on a sectarian dimension.

The children are between five and eight years old, he said, and had been at the school, which has about 50 students, for evening Arabic and Koranic lessons.

Christian leaders have urged authorities to take action against spiralling violence blamed on Boko Haram, with

deep frustration over their seeming inability to stop attacks despite heavy-handed military crackdowns.

A Christian leader in Nigeria's north has warned that "religious war" could result if the problem is not addressed, though he urged Christians not to retaliate.

On Wednesday, a coalition of Nigerian Pentecostal churches said they will defend themselves if authorities do not protect them from attacks, though an official stressed they were not advocating taking up arms.

Violence had been raging even in the days before the Christmas bombings, especially in the northeastern cities of Damaturu, Potiskum and Maiduguri. Most violence attributed to Boko Haram has occurred in the northeast.

Argentina's Kirchner has cancer, will have surgery



BUENOS AIRES (AFP) - Argentina's President Cristina Kirchner has been diagnosed with thyroid cancer and will undergo surgery next week, two months after being re-elected in a landslide vote, her spokesman said.

Kirchner, the country's first elected female president, was found to have cancer "on the

right lobe of the thyroid gland" during a routine medical examination on December 22, said spokesman Alfredo Scoccimarro.

"The illness has been contained," Scoccimarro emphasized in a statement, adding the cancer had not metastasized. Tests carried out Tuesday showed the cancer had also not spread to Kirchner's lymph nodes, he added.

The 58-year-old Kirchner was expected to spend 72 hours in hospital and then three weeks recovering from the surgery, he said. During that time, her vice president Amado Boudou will carry out her duties.

"The prospects (for recovery) are excellent, and no one should expect any further de-

velopment of the tumor after the operation," oncologist Marco Bruno, a member of the Argentina Cancer Association, told local television.

He added that because the tumor had been diagnosed early it could be safely removed, allowing the patient to lead a normal life.

The win, a year after her husband and predecessor's sudden death, was powered by a slew of popular social programs and years of strong, virtually uninterrupted economic growth.

Nestor Kirchner, who was president between 2003 and 2007, is credited with rescuing Argentina by breaking with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), restructuring the debt and promoting spending.

Times names Tunisian fruitseller 'person of 2011'



A picture taken in November 2011 shows the mother (C) of Mohamed Bouazizi posing with his sons photo.

LONDON (AFP) - The Times newspaper in London on Wednesday named Mohamed Bouazizi, the Tunisian fruit seller who unwittingly started a wave of protests known as the Arab Spring, as its person of 2011.

The 26-year-old from a poor family set himself alight in the town of Sidi Bouzid on December 17, 2010, in protest against harassment by officials, and died from his burns in early January.

His actions sparked a revolt

that toppled president Zine El Abidine Ben Ali and ignited protests across the region which ultimately led to the fall of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi.

"Mr Bouazizi takes his place with other figures whose willingness to see through the charade of oppressive rule elevated them beyond the drudgeries and petty humiliations of commonplace existence," The Times said in an editorial.

"His brief life and agonising death are a fanfare for the common man."

Bouazizi's mother told the newspaper that her son did not intend to kill himself when he set himself on fire, but merely wanted to protest against the confiscation of his weighing scales during an inspection of his fruit stall.

Already struggling to earn a living from the unlicensed business, his pride was also severely dented when a female official confiscated his fruit and slapped him, his mother said, although the official has denied this.

Whatever his intentions, "his death inspired downtrodden masses to believe that it is possible to challenge the local police officer, the security agent, the governor and even the president-for-life", The Times said.



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Health & Living

French breast implant tycoon hits back as scandal grows



Jean-Claude Mas, the 72-year-old president of the now-bankrupt Poly Implant Prothese (PIP), is seen in January holding a breast implant.

PARIS (AFP) - Holed up at his home in the south of France, the founder of troubled breast implant manufacturer PIP is fighting back against a growing international scandal over his allegedly faulty products.

Between 300,000 and 400,000 women in 65 countries from Europe to Latin America have implants made with sub-standard silicone gel by 72-year-old Jean-Claude Mas's now-bankrupt company Poly Implant Prothese (PIP).

France last week advised 30,000 women to have their

PIP implants removed because of an increased risk of rupture. Authorities in other countries have advised women to consult their doctors over the implants, while it emerged Monday that US authorities had already raised the alarm over the company in 2000.

Lawsuits filed in the US cite defective merchandise not suited for its intended purpose and violations of consumer legislation by PIP, which was once the world's third-largest producer of silicone implants.

With Mas due in a French court next year, questions are increasingly being asked over why it took until 2010 for French authorities to intervene, while Mas's lawyer has been actively defending his client in the press.

"He's at home... he's not on the run at all. Moreover he can't walk because he's just been operated on," lawyer

Yves Haddad told AFP, saying he simply "doesn't want to talk" publicly.

Haddad said that Mas freely admits using unapproved silicone gel, but remains adamant it is safe.

PIP used two types of silicone in its implants, Haddad said. One of them was an approved gel made by American firm Nusil, but it also used an "identical" homemade gel that was five times cheaper.

A lawyer representing four French women who received the PIP implants, Laurent Gaudon, said Wednesday they would be suing the manufacturer and their surgeons.

Mas worked at pharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers (now Bristol-Myers Squibb) before meeting up with plastic surgeon Henri Arion who introduced breast implants to France in 1965, Haddad said.

Mas's trial for "aggravated fraud" is due to open late 2012, while a manslaughter inquiry has also been opened after at least one suspicious death in France.

Venezuela offers to remove French-made breast implants



CARACAS (AFP) - Venezuela's public health service will remove for free French-made breast implants feared to be at risk of rupturing, Health Minister Eugenia Sader said this week.

"Patients who wish to have

breast implants made by the French company Poly Implant Prothese (PIP) may head to hospitals with plastic surgery units to have them removed at no cost," state news agency AVN quoted Sader as saying.

France's health ministry has

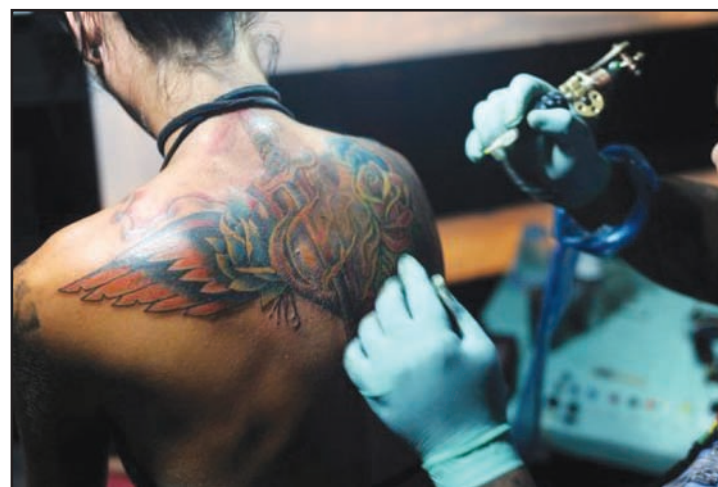
advised 30,000 women in France with PIP implants to have them removed, saying that while there is no proven cancer risk, the prostheses could rupture.

Any woman who declines the removal must have a breast scan every six months, the ministry added.

Prosecutors in Marseille, near PIP's home base of Seyne-sur-Mer, have received more than 2,000 complaints from French women who received the implants, and have opened a criminal investigation into the firm.

Documents obtained by AFP showed tens of thousands of women in more than 65 countries, mainly in South America and western Europe, received implants produced by PIP.

Indonesia probes Bali tattoo HIV infection report



File illustration photo shows a woman getting a tattoo in the Indonesian island of Bali in September.

JAKARTA (AFP) - Indonesia is investigating the case of an Australian who is believed to have been infected with HIV while getting a tattoo on the resort island of Bali, an official said yesterday.

"We received a report about this case from the health ministry yesterday and officials will be visiting tattoo parlours today to verify this claim," Bali health department chief Nyoman Sutedja told AFP.

"At this point, we are still investigating. We can't say for sure if the patient caught the virus from getting a tattoo or sexual contact," he added.

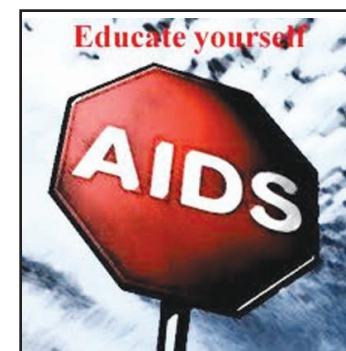
There are currently 4,200 HIV/AIDS cases on Bali, Sutedja said.

Australian health authorities on Friday said a patient diagnosed with HIV probably contracted the virus while being tattooed on the island. They

did not reveal any details of the individual concerned.

More than a million tourists visit Bali every year to enjoy its white, surf beaches, nightlife and Hindu culture.

Indonesian officials said last year that the number of known HIV/AIDS cases on Bali was soaring, with one in four prostitutes reported to be HIV-positive and the number of infections jumping almost 19 percent from the year before.



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Sci-Tech

Oil on Nigerian coast after major Shell spill: NGO



Spilled crude oil floats on the banks of the Niger Delta. Shell deployed ships and mobilising planes to clean up an oil spill at a major field off Nigeria, the company says, with some 40,000 barrels estimated to have leaked into the sea.

AFP Photo

ABUJA (AFP) - An environmental group said Tuesday that an oil slick had approached Nigeria's coastline

after a major Shell spill last week, but the company insisted that its spill had been largely dispersed.

Nigerian group Environmental Rights Action, which closely monitors oil spills in the country, said oil was reported along the shoreline of fishing communities in Bayelsa state as well as Delta state.

The group said it sent monitors out after reports from fishermen. It said it suspected the oil had come from the Shell spill, but the claim could not be independently verified.

"In the course of the visit, spreading slick was sighted close to the coastline of Odioama and along St. Nicholas," it said in a report that included photos of streaks of what appeared to be oil just off the coastline.

"The footprint comes from the ocean," the group's head Nnimmo Bassey told AFP.

"We suspect it is from Bonga."

Shell has said the spill from its offshore Bonga field, which it became aware of on December 20, amounted to less than 40,000 barrels and that it had been "largely dispersed."

Five vessels and two aircraft had been deployed to spread chemical dispersants.

A Shell spokesman in Nigeria told AFP that "if there was any more spill found on the coastline, it must have come from a third party."

"We found a third-party spill and we have told our team on the ground to clean it. If there is still a spill on the shoreline, it is a third-party spill," Precious Okolobo said.

Bonga, which has a capac-

ity of 200,000 barrels per day, is located some 120 kilometres off Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer and an OPEC member. Production has halted at the field.

The company said the source of the leak was a flexible line linking a production vessel to a tanker.

It was Nigeria's worst offshore spill since a 1998 Mobil incident, officials said, though onshore leaks have been estimated at levels far worse since that time in the oil-producing Niger Delta.

Environmental group SkyTruth, using satellite imagery from December 21 it published on its website, estimated the slick had been 70 kilometres long and 17 kilometres wide at its widest.

It said it had covered 923 square kilometres (356 square miles) of ocean.

Dutch ice hotel offers cool overnight experience



Luc van Heijst and Maya Zhang before spending a night at the Netherlands' first ice hotel.

ZWOLLE (AFP) - In the quaint northeastern Dutch city of Zwolle, it could be any standard hotel room, with a bed, a minibar, bathrobes and two pairs of slippers. Except for the room temperature, which hovers just above freezing.

Welcome to the first Dutch ice hotel, all the usual comforts at eight degrees Celsius (46 degrees Fahrenheit).

"If you take a shower before bed, make sure your hair is dry or it will freeze. Do not drink too much alcohol, or eat too heavy a meal. Make sure you change clothes before entering the room," hotel manager Annet van Limburg told first-time visitors.

Laughing a little nervously, Luc van Heijst and Maya Zhang, both 42, listened carefully to her advice, their luggage stuffed with several pairs of pants, sweaters, gloves and hats.

"No, I'm not afraid, but I am still a little nervous," admitted

Van Heijst, who is from Veghel, an hour-and-a-half's drive to the south. "We came for the experience," he said, adding: "I feel like a little boy."

Built for an ice sculptors' festival in Zwolle and managed by a local hotel, the structure has three rooms and stands in a refrigerated warehouse.

This is the now the most southerly ice hotel in Europe, van Limburg said. Indeed, the idea comes from the north of the continent.

With 47 rooms for the 2011/12 season, the largest ice hotel is at Jukkasjarvi in Lapland in northern Sweden.

"Unlike Canada and Lapland, the hotel here is not situated in nature," said van Limburg. "There, the guests sleep in minus 20 degrees."

It took about 10 days to build the three rooms, where guests can stay from December 3 to January 29. A night for two including breakfast costs 199 euros (\$259).

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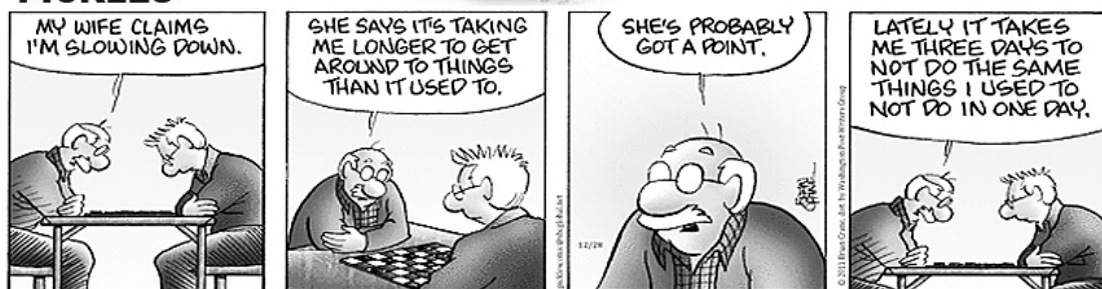
comes together in one night

Thursday at 8:00pm

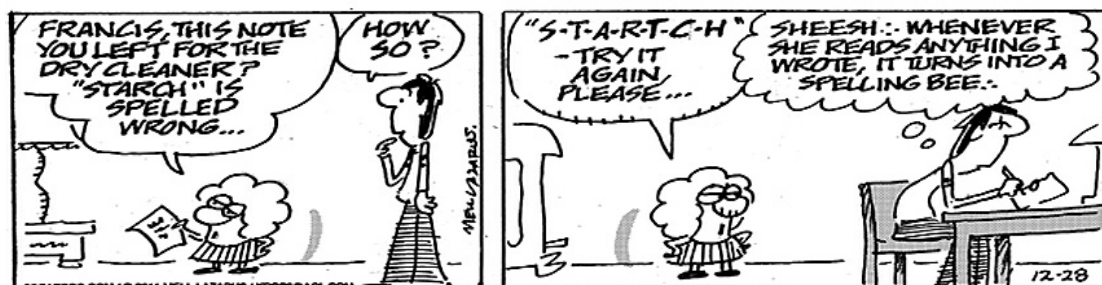
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ACROSS

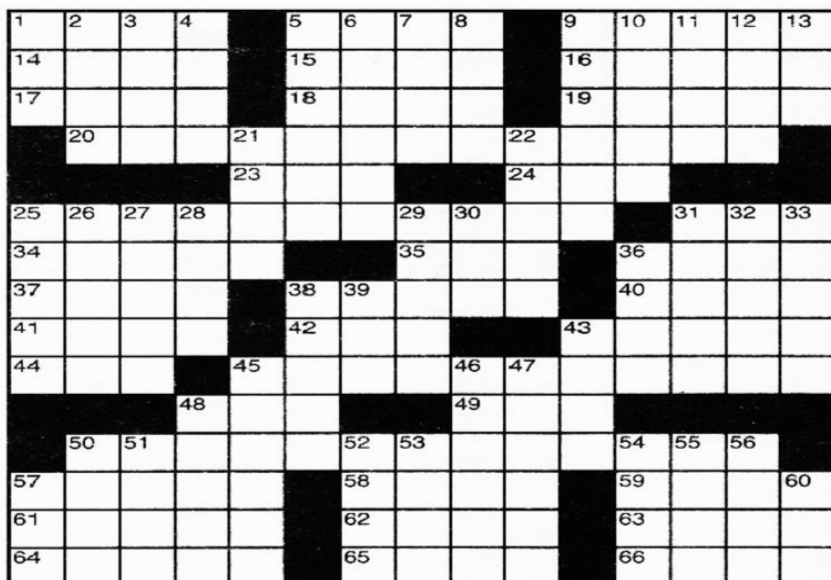
1. Jennifer Jones film, with "The"
5. Debra's "Will & Grace" costar
9. Tint
14. Sally in space
15. Verne's violent pacifist
16. Black of "Five Easy Pieces"
17. Soon, poetically
18. Writer Silverstein
19. Cara or Papas
20. Sheepskin time
23. Thing: Lat.
24. Whichever one
25. Was truant
31. Wise-guy's weapon
34. Carried on
35. Early: prefix
36. River through Firenze
37. Ruler of the Aesir
38. Quashed, as a rumor
40. Hard work
41. "American Graffiti" drive-in
42. Kind of cycle
43. Put out
44. Cinnabar, e.g.
45. Gable-Day flick
48. By: Sp.
49. Sooner than, in poetry
50. Romberg operetta, with "The"
57. Scottish landowner
58. 1977 Richard Harris film
59. Ishmael tells of this captain

DOWN

1. Glass of "This American Life"
2. Dent's baby brother
3. Reputation
4. Olin of TV's "Alias"
5. Followed
6. Adapt old material
7. "___ a Girl" ("Bells Are Ringing")

8. E. ___ (intestine bacillus)
9. Straight ___ (inside dope)
10. "Return of the Native" author
11. Expanse
12. Plead "not guilty"
13. Wind dir.
21. ___ Scott Decision
22. Like the bucket of song
25. PR campaign
26. Dock worker
27. Limber
28. Thirsts
29. Of vision
30. Acapulco gold
31. Coterie
32. Sambuca flavor
33. For rent

36. Old Testament book
38. Metric measure
39. Constellation of eight stars
43. Three: Ger.
45. Walk unsteadily
46. '50s jazz fan
47. Misprints
48. More pristine
50. Coherent
51. Buster's bulldog
52. Iditarod's end
53. Horse's gait
54. Place for a bun
55. Hack
56. Abate
57. Cub Scout, e.g.
60. Garden frequenter

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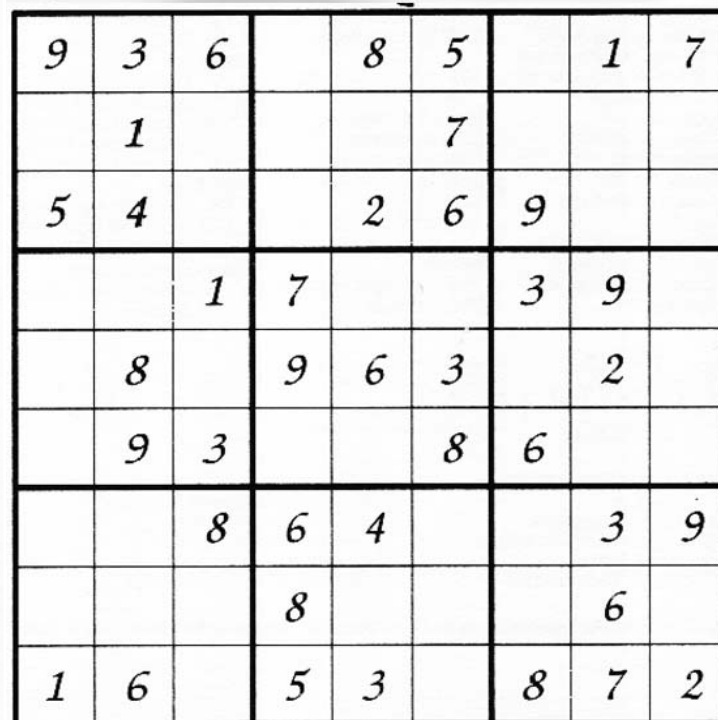
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Sudoku



SOLUTION

2	1	8	6	5	9	7	1
9	1	2	8	6	5	3	7
6	5	1	9	8	2	7	3
5	9	8	1	2	6	7	4
1	2	4	9	6	5	8	7
8	6	5	9	1	2	7	3
5	8	9	2	1	7	4	6
9	5	7	4	6	3	1	8
4	1	2	5	8	7	9	6

Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9. A number is Never repeated in a row or column. In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9



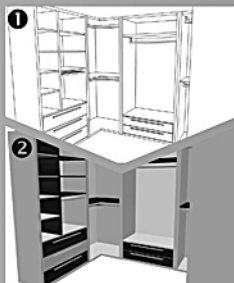
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Finance

France approves soda tax

PARIS (AFP) - France's top constitutional body yesterday approved a new tax on sugary drinks that aims to fight obesity while giving a boost to state coffers.

The Constitutional Council approved the new soda tax, announced in August as part of the government's fight against obesity and within the framework of a broader austerity program, after it was passed in parliament last week.

The tax, which works out to one euro cent per can of drink, is expected to bring in 120 million euros (\$156 million) in state revenues.

The tax has been slammed by beverage firms including Coca-Cola, which in September said it was suspending a planned 17-million-euro investment at a plant in the south

of France in "a symbolic protest against a tax that punishes our company and stigmatises our products."

The Constitutional Court yesterday also approved an increase in the reduced Value Added Tax (VAT) on some goods and services from 5.5 percent to 7.0 percent.

Introduced in 2009 as part of economic stimulus measures, the reduced rate saw VAT lowered from 19.6 percent for some businesses, in-

cluding restaurants and hotels.

The French government has sought to reassure investors and maintain its triple-A credit rating with a series of austerity measures, including the announcement last month of 65 billion euros in savings by 2016, on top of the 12-billion-euro deficit-cutting package announced in August.

The government has said it needs to make 100 billion euros in savings to balance the budget by 2016.

Japan, India strike \$15 billion currency swap deal

NEW DELHI (AFP) - Japan and India struck a \$15 billion currency swap deal yesterday that could support the sagging rupee as Japanese premier Yoshihiko Noda made a lightning trip to New Delhi to push closer ties.

The deal was part of a slew of agreements clinched by India and Japan, which is seeking to forge stronger alliances in the Asian region as a counterweight to China's growing might.

"I am convinced we need to strengthen the economic partnership," said Noda, whose country sees India an attractive market with its increasingly affluent middle class, especially

with the European and US economies slowing.

"Japan has technology and capital while India has a young workforce as well as abundant demand for infrastructure," he said, calling the "complementarity" between the second- and third-largest Asian economies "unmatched".

The currency swap, under which Japan could lend India dollars to defend the ailing rupee, is an expansion of a \$3 billion accord that expired earlier this year.

The currency agreement is an extra weapon for India, which has \$300 billion in reserves, to use in propping up the rupee.



Current as of:
12/28/2011

Currency	Code	Buying rate banknotes	Buying Cheques	Selling Rate
U.S.A.	USD	1.77	1.78	1.80
Dutch Antilles	ANG	98.00	100.00	100.20
Canada	CAD	1.73	1.75	1.77
Britain	GBP	2.73	2.78	2.84
Switzerland	CHF	190.77	191.49	192.29
Netherlands	EUR	230.75	232.85	235.19
Sweden	SEK	24.97	25.69	26.49
Denmark	DKK	30.35	31.07	31.87
Norway	NOK	28.89	29.61	30.41
Japan	JPY	227.32	229.39	231.70

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Euro dives close to one-year low at \$1.2943

LONDON (AFP) - The European single currency tumbled yesterday close to a one-year low, as investors fretted over the eurozone sovereign debt crisis on the eve of Italy's second bond auction in just two days.

In late afternoon deals, the euro slumped to \$1.2941 -- which was the lowest point since January 11. It later pulled back slightly to stand at \$1.2962.

At the same time, the shared eurozone unit plunged to 100.80 yen. That was a whisker away from the ten-year low of 100.76 yen that was hit in early October.

"While Italy managed to have a successful auction of short-term six-month debt, market jitters are still there in regards to the 10-year debt on offer by Italy in tomorrow's trading session," said Money-Corp analyst Mark Deans.

"Italian 10-year yields rallied after dipping initially after the short-term debt auction, moving back above 6.9 percent.

"With the overhanging fear about the eurozone sovereign debt crisis, the open of US

cash equity trading saw a flight to safety and a move into safe haven currencies like the Japanese yen and US dollar."

Deans added that thin trading conditions ahead of the year-end were also exacerbating moves in the foreign exchange market.

Italy paid sharply lower rates yesterday to raise 9.0 billion euros (\$11.8 billion) in a six-month bond sale as tensions over the eurozone's third economy eased after its tough austerity plan.

The sale was being seen as a bellwether for eurozone sentiment at the end of a year in which borrowing costs have spiked to record highs over fears that the euro itself could disintegrate because of high debt levels.

Yesterday's rate was 3.251 percent -- half the 6.504 percent paid for a similar operation in November and also lower than the 3.535 percent in October.

"It's a quiet week in the City as most people take advantage of the bank holidays to extend their Christmas breaks," added Forex.com analyst Kathleen Brooks.

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Yoko Ono travelling to India for 'inspiration'

NEW DELHI (AFP) - Yoko Ono believes Bollywood has a lot to teach the world and says she will be looking for "inspiration" in India when she holds an exhibition here next month.

The avant-garde artist, musician and widow of Beatles singer John Lennon will visit New Delhi for an art show that opens on January 13.

The Japanese-born Ono, 78, told the Hindustan Times newspaper in an email interview from her New York home that she hoped to get more out of her coming trip than on a previous India visit she made with Lennon.

"The visit in the past was just to appreciate and enjoy India's land and culture -- this time I am coming for encouragement and inspiration," she said.

All the Beatles had visited India in 1968 to attend a transcendental meditation course led by the mystic Maharishi Mahesh Yogi.

"(After) the famous visit he made with his three friends, John and I later visited India just by ourselves, and loved

it," she said.

Her art exhibition, "Our Beautiful Daughters," is being hosted by the private Vadehra Art Gallery and runs until March 10.

"It is a special new installation for India by Ms. Ono that is a homage to Indian women -- their strength," gallery director Parul Vadehra told AFP.

The show will also include an archive of her music, movies and work with Lennon, as well as a performance by the artist herself.

"I will be doing music as well. I am hoping that I can do it with Indian musicians," Ono said.

Last year, her Plastic Ono Band, formed in 1969 while Lennon was alive, performed with entertainers such as Lady Gaga, Eric Clapton and others.

One area that Ono is keen to explore is Bollywood cinema.

"Just as we learnt a lot of things from Hollywood films for ages, I think the world will learn many things from Indian films about truth, justice and freedom," Ono told the newspaper.

Female singers dazzle in 2011



PARIS (AFP) - Music fans may remember 2011 mainly as the year Amy Winehouse died, but the last 12 months have seen several other divas dominate the international music press for happier reasons.

Veteran British songwriter PJ Harvey, soul singer Adele and American newcomer Lana del Rey all produced songs or albums that won wide critical praise.

Perhaps the most notable of these was Harvey's "Let England Shake," which provided a fitting soundtrack for a year that saw Britain's worst riots in decades.

According to the website Metacritic.com, which monitors reviews across 80 English-language publications, Harvey's eighth studio album

was the year's best.

It took Harvey, one of indie rock's most enduring and distinctive female voices, three years to research and record "Let England Shake."

Filled with political references, anti-war sentiment and influenced by her discussions with Afghan women and other sources, the album provided critics -- especially those in Britain -- with plenty to talk about, and Harvey's record won this year's Mercury Prize for best British album.

"England did indeed shake this year to the sound of riots, protests and distant wars," The Guardian wrote. "No wonder, then, that PJ Harvey's raw yet meticulously researched record hit a nerve."

Critics across the pond also feted Harvey, though the hugely influential indie and alternative music site Pitchfork.com placed her album fourth in a list of the year's best. Top place went to the self-titled album by American progressive folk group Bon Iver.

Adele, the 23-year soul

powerhouse from London, released her second album "21" to high praise from fans and critics alike.

Billboard, Rolling Stone and Time all voted "21" the year's best album, which already has sold more than 12 million copies.

Adele was forced to cancel several performances after undergoing vocal chord surgery from which she is expected to make a full recovery.

2011 was also a memorable year for rookie songstress Lana del Rey.

Though her debut album, "Born to Die", won't be released until January, her first single "Video Games" has already been endlessly blogged about, viewed on YouTube, remixed and parodied.

Notably, though, the sultry New York singer's single was also voted best song of the year by the NME, The Guardian and other publications.

In Britain, one of the UK's highest-selling albums was Winehouse's "Back to Black."

The diva's second and final album was originally released in 2006 but saw a sales surge after her July 23 death from alcohol poisoning.

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Stunning sunset



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La Trattoria el Faro Blanco took over the location some years ago, and the restaurant's quaint trappings, superb selection and amenable staff has made it a one of the island's most popular dining spots ever since.

Savoring the sight of a spectacular Aruban sunset and the tiered layout of the eatery also makes it the ideal spot for marking a special occasion, such as an anniversary or a marriage proposal, as well as a perfect venue for weddings or a celebratory party. An extensive and diverse menu and wine list allows those planning a special festivity will be able to devise a memorable event and management is ready and willing to help you stay within your budget.

Many have taken note of this singular location as the place to go for that memorable romantic meal, and their reservation staff reports a waiting list for the rail tables that offer the best unobstructed view,



Osso Buco with Risotto

recommending reservations well in advance if this is important to you.

The restaurant is now open from early in the day for refreshments, and is the perfect lunch stop while touring, serving from 11:00 AM to 3:00 PM, after which visitors can enjoy a light snack from their Pizza Mini Menu until 6:00 PM when they officially open for dinner, until 11:00 PM.

All these aspects of charming surroundings, dining al fresco with a breathtaking view (or in their enclosed air-conditioned dining room, if you prefer) and fine food makes La Trattoria El Faro the single dining experience that must not be missed before departing Aruba. Reservations can be made by calling 586-0786 or 586-0787, or via e-mail link at their website, www.aruba-latratortoria.com, where you can peruse their latest menu, as Chef Alberto is always devising some tasty new specialty to take advantage of what is fresh for the season.

SPORTS

Football: Suarez hit with new FA ban over Fulham gesture



LONDON (AFP) - Liverpool striker Luis Suarez has been banned by the Football Association (FA) for one match and fined £20,000 (\$31,300) for a gesture made towards Fulham fans in the 1-0 defeat at Craven Cottage earlier this month.

Suarez had admitted the latest charge of improper conduct, and Liverpool have also been fined £20,000 for failing to control their players in the same match -- a charge related to the dismissal of midfielder Jay Spearing.

The ruling, announced on Wednesday by the FA, comes little over a week after Suarez was hit with an eight-game suspension for racially abusing Manchester United's Patrice

Evra during a match in October.

Suarez had denied the racism allegations and the decision angered Liverpool, who promised to stick by the player and issued a statement in support of the Uruguayan.

Suarez's new ban means he will miss Friday's home game against Newcastle United in the Premier League.

His eight-game suspension is currently on hold, however, as Liverpool have 14 days to appeal once they have received the written judgement from the independent commission that heard the case.

Liverpool admitted the improper conduct charge relating to Spearing's dismissal, after a number of players remonstrated with referee Keith Friend, but they did not accept the financial penalty for the offence.

A statement from the FA read: "Liverpool Football Club have been fined £20,000 by The FA and warned as to their future conduct for failing to ensure their players conducted

themselves in an orderly fashion during the league fixture at Fulham.

"The club admitted the charge, which was in relation to the dismissal of Jay Spearing, but did not accept the standard £20,000 penalty for the offence.

"However, at an Independent Regulatory Commission hearing today (Wednesday) the fine was imposed.

"Meanwhile, Liverpool player Luis Suarez will begin a one-match suspension with immediate effect after he admitted an FA charge of improper conduct in relation to the same game.

"Suarez was also fined £20,000 and warned as to his future conduct following a gesture he made towards the Fulham fans at the end of the fixture."

Liverpool made no comment on either Suarez's punishment or the fine imposed on the club.

Kenny Dalglish's side are currently sixth in the Premier League table, three points below the Champions League places, following a 1-1 draw at home to Blackburn Rovers on Monday.

Tennis: Djokovic, Nadal, Federer look for early blows

ABU DHABI (AFP) - Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Roger Federer meet in a \$250,000 three-day exhibition tournament in the Gulf's winter sun from today, eager to strike early blows ahead of the 2012 season.

In the new year, world number one Djokovic will defend three Grand Slam titles and Nadal will look to hang on to his Olympic title and French Open crown, while Federer, despite nearing his 31st birthday, is keen to extend his impressive late run in 2011.

Djokovic won three of the four Grand Slams and five Masters this year and assembled a 70-6 winning record.

His progress towards the end of the year was slowed by a series of back and shoulder injuries, but the Serb insists he is well rested as 2012 approaches.

"This year's success gives me a reason to believe that I can win again. Why not?" said the Serb, who has been based in Abu Dhabi for the last two weeks.

"I think it doesn't make any

sense to be anything other than optimistic. I need to believe in my qualities and my abilities and I need to believe that I can repeat the success.

"Of course it is going to be an incredibly difficult task to achieve, but you never know, nothing is really impossible."

Nadal lost his world number one ranking to Djokovic in 2011 and cut a world-weary figure as the year came to an end, having played 84 matches -- more than any of his rivals.

But the 25-year-old, whose French Open triumph was his 10th major and sixth at Roland Garros, believes leading Spain to a fifth Davis Cup has helped re-ignite his hopes for 2012.

He is also determined to adopt a new approach to his trade.

"I tell myself: 'If I do a bit more, I will be nearly back to winning things again.' That is the motivation. Recovering the extra will that makes you give a bit more of yourself," he said.

"I have to get back to my cruising altitude, which should be higher. From Indian Wells to Wimbledon and the

Olympic Games is where I have to recover my best level."

Federer, meanwhile, defied those who believe that having celebrated his 30th birthday in 2011, his best was behind him.

The Swiss won his first title in Doha in January before picking up three more in the home straight in Basel, Paris and a sixth World Tour finals trophy.


He will go into 2012, his 13th year on the tour, on the back of a 17-match winning run.

"My passion for competition and my love for tennis has a lot to do with it," Federer told The National newspaper here.

"I have always said that the minute you decide or think that you cannot improve is the time that you should stop playing.

"The good news for me is that I feel like I still have things to learn and parts of my game to improve, so I am excited for the future."

The three-day tournament at the Abu Dhabi International Tennis Complex in Yayed Sports City also features Spain's David Ferrer and French duo Jo-Wilfried Tsonga and Gael Monfils.




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Rookie Cole shines as Heat hold off Celtics



Norris Cole #30 of the Miami Heat drives against Jermaine O'Neal #7 of the Boston Celtics during a game at American Airlines Arena on December 27, 2011 in Miami, Florida.

MIAMI (AFP) - LeBron James scored 26 points, Dwyane Wade added 24 and rookie Norris Cole's 14 fourth-quarter points helped Miami hold off Boston's late challenge in a 115-107 NBA victory on Tuesday.

The star-studded Heat

dominated most of the contest, leading by as many as 20 points before the determined Celtics twice narrowed the deficit to three points in the closing minutes.

Cole, playing his second NBA contest, helped make the difference as he delivered 14 of his 20 points in the final period -- the reserve point guard earning chants of "MVP" from the Miami crowd.

Cole also took a charge from Boston's imposing Brandon Bass with 3:15 remaining. Sprawled on the court, Cole was clearly delighted as the foul was called on Bass.

Chris Bosh added 18 points for Miami, who opened the lockout-shortened season with a victory over Dallas on Christmas Day in a rematch of the NBA championship series won by the Mavericks last season.

Ray Allen scored 28 points for the Celtics, who were again without Paul Pierce.

Pierce bruised a heel in the team's first practice at training camp and has missed Boston's first two games -- both defeats.

Coach Doc Rivers said Pierce would also miss Wednesday's contest at New Orleans.

Rajon Rondo finished with 22 points and 12 assists for Boston, and Keyon Dooling came off the bench and chipped in 13 points.

But the Celtics could not overcome the Heat's aggressive attack and red-hot 56 per cent shooting from the field.

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Vairrelles to spend New Year behind bars



France: Tony Vairrelles arriving at court AFP/Photo

NANCY (AFP) - Former France player Tony Vairrelles and three of his brothers will spend the New Year festivities behind bars after an appeals court here rejected their requests to be released on Wednesday.

Vairrelles and his siblings - Giovan, Jimmy and Fabrice -- have been in prison since the end of October after being charged with attempted murder over a shooting at a nightclub. They deny the charges.

The four men had made two previous pleas to be freed, both of which were also rejected.

"We've had enough of it, we're being dragged through the mud," said their father,

Guy, after Wednesday's hearing.

"(The judge) is only looking at the statements from the bouncers, not the anomalies in the case."

Three bouncers were injured after the shooting, which took place outside a nightclub on the outskirts of

the eastern French city of Nancy.

According to police, Jimmy, 20, and Giovan, 30, were thrown out of the venue in Essey-les-Nancy after an altercation but later returned with 38-year-old Tony and Fabrice, 40.

They reportedly attacked the bouncers using a baseball bat and a metal chain, before shots were fired.

Vairrelles was born in Nancy, and went on to star for local side AS Nancy, before notable spells with both Lens and Lyon.

He won the French title with Lens in 1998 and with Lyon in 2003, and won eight caps for France.

Vairrelles later became the majority shareholder at third-tier club Gueugnon, who went into liquidation earlier this year.

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Japan golf legend Sugihara dies from cancer



TOKYO (AFP) - Japanese golf legend Teruo Sugihara died Wednesday after a long battle with prostate cancer in a career that spanned more than a half century and

earned him the nickname "Don" of Japan's pro tour.

Sugihara, who was 74, was also known as the "Viper" for his tenacity despite standing at just 160 centimetres (5.2 feet). He won 63 tournaments including the 1969 Hong Kong Open, his only overseas victory.

Sugihara, a former Osaka caddie who turned pro in 1957 and captured his first career title in 1962 at the Japan Open, was diagnosed with prostate cancer in 1997 and made his ailment public the next year.

He continued to play professionally for over a dozen years after his diagnosis.

In 2006, at the age of 68 years and 10 months, the veteran became the oldest player ever to make the cut at

a competition in the top-tier Japanese tour.

That bested a US PGA record of 67 years and two months set by Sam Snead who died in 2002 at the age of 89.

Sugihara set another record by playing the Chunichi Crowns tournament for 51 years in a row, eclipsing Arnold Palmer's feat of 50 consecutive Masters outings.

He made his final tour appearance at the Mizuno Open last year.

"Mr. Sugihara taught me the rigours of golf since I was young," said Isao Aoki, 69, one of Japan's most successful golfers, who was inducted to the World Golf Hall of Fame in 2004.

"It is really regretful that we have lost Mr. Sugihara, the most senior active player in golf."

Masashi "Jumbo" Ozaki, 64, another Japanese golf star, said: "I can only guess that he fought a tough battle with the disease. May he rest in peace."

In the last installment of a regular newspaper column, Sugihara wrote: "It's too much to bear it and my condition forces me to say, 'I'd rather be dead.'"

He ended the November 9 editorial with the word "sayonara."

Coe vows London in 2012 will not be 'siege city'

LONDON (AFP) - London Olympics chief Sebastian Coe has vowed the British capital will not become a "siege city" in 2012 despite plans to deploy large numbers of weapons and soldiers, in comments published Wednesday.

The British government announced this month it would have 13,500 troops on duty for the 2012 Games, more than the 7,000 widely expected.

Two navy ships, warplanes and ground-to-air missiles would also be deployed to provide security, it said.

But in comments to the Guardian newspaper, Coe insisted that security concerns would be finely balanced with making visitors feel welcome.

"There has to be proportionality here," he told the daily.

"You don't want people

coming to London thinking they've walked into siege city, being filmed every 20 paces they take and being bundled off pavements.

"It's certainly not what you are going to get legacy tourism from."

He added: "There is no appetite for risk ... But we also want people to come here and leave feeling they've had an extraordinary time and want to come back."

Announcing the plans for troops and weapons on December 15, defence minister Philip Hammond said they would "contribute to ensuring a safe, secure and enjoyable 2012 Olympics."

The government also raised the Games' security budget this month from £282 million (\$442 million, 338 million euros) to £553 million.



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